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TWO VOLUMES OF RABBINIC SELECTIONS.

*Tales from the Talmud*¹ is a careful compilation which will appeal to Jew and Gentile alike: it is not a mere *réchauffé* of the works of previous writers, but a florilegium of selections skilfully collected and arranged with taste and judgment. Mr. Montague surveys old ground with modern glasses, his manner is felicitous, and he presents his material in a readable and attractive form; in short, his book stands in striking contrast to the inaccurate and slovenly productions dealing with Talmudica, which we know too well.

Two blemishes, which can well be remedied in a second edition, are the lack of an index and references, and the excessive space devoted to what may be called the "comic" element. A general reader, unacquainted with the Talmud, would carry away with him the idea that the bulk of matter contained in its endless pages was of a trivial or ludicrous nature. Mr. Montague, in his preface, pleads that "he comes but to amuse," still, he takes a somewhat undue advantage of his privilege.

To turn to detail.

We entirely endorse Mr. Montague's view, that an extraordinary statement in the Talmud is generally an expression of opinion on the part of one individual, not the consensus of all the Rabbis. Hence any one who looks into the Talmud for the purpose "of confirming previously formed theories may easily find in such a mass of material, statements, which . . . appear to support any view he has formed." This view is very well put. Many things which seem to us nonsensical and extravagant have a *raison d'être* which we do not always grasp. If we realized circumstances and causes we could then more easily comprehend the results. Thus, many instances of hair-splitting and casuistry, "the tithing of rue and cummin," are nothing but dialectic exercises; such cases were never intended for practical use. The most modern and scientific code of laws must provide for unlikely and improbable cases; similarly, the Talmud, an encyclopaedia, code, and many other books in one, cannot justly be blamed for the same fault.

Mr. Montague has perhaps been a little hard on the Talmud on the ground of its lack of co-ordination. It is true that no order of time or subject is followed, but the arrangement of matter by association of ideas is a mnemonic help. The principle of *מלתא לנו אורחא* is all the more natural when it is remembered that the Talmud was unprovided with an index and that it existed for centuries in an unwritten

¹ *Tales from the Talmud*, by R. Montague, Blackwood.

form, when the preservation of the integrity of its text would depend on the memory alone.

So also on p. 5: "The . . . reader . . . will find things which a modern regards as of the utmost importance, set down beside things which seem to him utterly trivial." This is, of course, correct; but such a state of things is inevitable under a system which includes morality, manners, and municipal by-laws under its religious legislation. Such a grouping tends, it may be argued, not to belittle the great, but to magnify the small. "Do not weigh one command against another, for thou knowest not the relative worth of either," also prevents the doing of evil for the sake of ultimate good, and sets wholesome though by no means rigid bounds to the vagaries of private judgment in theology. Mr. Montague's explanation of this tendency (p. 71), "that the ancients had a *different* sense of proportion, a *different* way of looking at things," is one which we may accept, with perhaps the substitution of "better" for "different."

We cannot quite agree with the theory (p. 112) that "the Rabbis may have found . . . a significance in the resemblance between the Hebrew consonants of *Rome* and *Edom*." This would be quite contrary to philology. It is usually held that Bible names, for example, are assonances to, rather than actual etymological derivations from those words and circumstances to which the text refers them, e. g. Moses, Babel; Edom, in the mouths of the Rabbis, is an historical, not an epigraphical pseudonym for Rome. Instances are frequent; in the story of the Rabbis of בני ברק in the Hagada for Passover, יציאת מצרים obviously refers to the abortive "Exodus from *Rome*," under Bar Kochba.

The chapter on Demons is very interesting. It may, however, be pointed out that "evil spirit" very often is only another way of expressing an abstract idea. Hebrew language and mind prefer the concrete, where we should substitute abstract ideas, such as "danger," "infection," "wickedness." Thus a man should wash his hands every morning on rising on account of the "Evil Spirits" (i. e. uncleanness), which cling to them. Perhaps, too, the "Evil Spirit" (page 172, line 13) is a euphemistic alternative for some particular gang of brigands whom it was not safe to mention, either on account of their superior strength or because of the danger of "evil eye" incurred by uttering their names. This theory, though it would harmonize with the context, which refers to two other classes of depredators, is of course pure conjecture.

In considering the origin of the belief in "Powers of Evil" (p. 171), later Gnostic, as well as Zoroastrian, influences should be regarded;

it may also be added that this belief develops the status of a fairy tale rather than a superstition, and this position is its justification, for allegory is always good till it is taken in gross reality.

We are pedantic enough to cavil occasionally at the transliteration, e. g., p. 138, זַיְחָר "zaychare."

Although, as stated above, the preface claims that the book is a collection of the quaint and bizarre only, yet Mr. Montague's able treatment of the subject makes us regret the somewhat insufficient space devoted to "Gematriah." We feel, too, that the homiletic and ethical application of stories—and this is surely their *raison d'être*—has not always been insisted upon, but here again this point is perhaps outside the aims of the book.

It is not so contrary to actual fact that foreigners of noble rank should have displayed a desire to know things Jewish (p. 253). It suffices to recall Elegabalus and Agrippina, or, to take a more creditable example, the "man of great authority, under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of the treasure" (Acts viii. 27). Mr. Montague lays slightly too much stress on the examples which he adduces.

In conclusion, we may point out some excellent and carefully written passages: pp. 283 sqq., 286 sqq. Lack of space prevents the inclusion of extracts, but we heartily welcome this addition to English Talmudica.

*Tales and Maxims from the Midrash*¹, by the Rev. Samuel Rapaport, is a book based on a different plan to that followed in Mr. Montague's volume. It is a successful endeavour to satisfy the student while instructing and amusing the unlearned reader. The general public are well cared for, and, notwithstanding, the demands of the scholar are given due prominence, less room having been found for the lighter element. The plan has been thought out carefully, and executed in an orderly and methodical manner. An explanatory sketch gives a clear and concise account of the growth of the *Midrash*, and defines *Agada* and *Halacha*. We recommend the chapter to lay readers and to Christian students of Jewish theology. This introduction is followed by some chapters on subjects round which the web of fable and tradition has woven many interesting stories, viz. Alexander the Great, Demons, Ashmedai, king of Demons, and the Messiah. After these we get fourteen chapters, each devoted to a separate *Midrash*, and, finally, an excellent index.

The source of every extract has been given, and some footnotes

¹ *Tales and Maxims from the Midrash*, by the Rev. Samuel Rapaport; London, George Routledge.

have been added here and there. The author has presented, in a systematic form, a mass of material which, it is easy to see, has been taken first hand from the original; hence the book not only provides attractive reading, but also serves as a reliable store of reference, of which subsequent writers may freely and unhesitatingly avail themselves. The work, which has been done so well, should offer an example and encouragement to others. Much is still to be accomplished, and now that this book has rendered the subject available to the wider circle of English students, the path of the pioneer should be followed by an enthusiastic crowd. To give only a few instances, "which call out, explain me," what could be more welcome than an essay on the use of Jewish fables by non-Jewish writers? Thus, on page 116, we have Sancho Panza's story of the gold coins concealed in a hollow cane. On page 121 we read:—

"Do not enter any house without some indication of your coming, such as knocking at the door; even in your own house you should not make your appearance suddenly or unexpectedly; something may be going on there which, however innocent, may cause you annoyance, and may lead to a want of peace and harmony in your household." (*Levit. Rabba*, 21.)

And we are at once reminded of the xxivth Surah of the *Quran*:—

"Ye who believe! do not enter houses, save your own houses, until ye have asked permission . . . this is good for you, haply you will be warned. And if it be that ye find none within, then enter not till leave be given."

What could be more entertaining and instructive than an excursus on Rabbinic conceptions of etiquette and the relation of *דרך ארץ* to religion: "Manners makyth the man," and much may still be written with advantage on the comparison of Jewish and other social codes.

The incident on page 92 suggests the mysterious worship of the Ophites, and opens up trains of thought as to Talmudic references to snake worship; a new treatise on this curious sect and what the Rabbis thought and said about them, would well repay the writing.

Then the chapter on Alexander reminds us that the last word has yet to be spoken on the attitude of the great conqueror towards the Jews. It is by no means certain that the traditional account is pure fiction. Who formerly believed in the letter of Aristeas? And yet subsequent researches have brought about a great modification in our ideas as to its authenticity. So, too, the story of Alexander and the High Priest must not be dismissed without due consideration. It would indeed be strange if the *Midrashic* accounts did not rest on a substratum of historical truth.

Something also might be added to the vast literature dealing with the founder of Christianity and the Talmud. We have the stories of "the mote in thy brother's eye" (Matt. vii. 3; Luke vi. 41) on page 207; the "widow's mite" (Luke xxi) on page 203; on page 113 the injunction contained in Luke xiv not to take the first places at table.

It is true that occasionally Mr. Rapaport has allowed himself to add a footnote, but we feel that he has been restraining his energies for another occasion. We look forward to a companion volume from his scholarly pen, giving the application of the fables, their subsequent history, the facts which they embody, and the truths which they teach. It might include a few special studies dealing with points similar to those raised, and perhaps an essay on the manner of thought of the Rabbis, showing their didactic and deductive methods and explaining the reason for some of their less obvious statements.

Incidentally we prefer the usual form "Hyrceanus" to "Horkynas" (p. 3), "Sanballat" to "Sanblat" (p. 10), and "Pausanias," the murderer of Philip of Macedon, to "Pisanus."

Mr. Rapaport's learning fits him peculiarly for the task of fashioning the material which he has given us into a companion volume to complement this present work, and if, as the preface states, *Tales and Maxims* is his *בן וקנין*, we may express the hope that it will not be an only child.

HERBERT J. LOEWE.